

## Message Text

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ORIGIN INR-10

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY SAIGON

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 095076

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, VS

SUBJECT: ANOTHER " ONE- MAN" ELECTION IN THE OFFING?

FOLLOWING IS TEXT OF INR ANALYSIS

1. PRESENT INDICATIONS ARE THAT THE AUGUST 26 SENATE ELECTION IN SOUTH VIETNAM, LIKE THE 1971 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, WILL BE A ONE- MAN SHOW, BRINGING RENEWED CRIES OF FOUL FROM PRESIDENT THIEU' S OPPOSITION AND HARSH CRITICISM FROM THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS. IF ONLY THIEU' S DEMOCRACY PARTY CONTESTS THE ELECTION, THIS COULD WELL DELIVER THE FINAL BLOW TO THE ALREADY IMPOTENT POLITICAL OPPOSITION AND SOLIDIFY THIEU' S POSITION AS THE LEADER OF A ONE- PARTY STATE.

2. DECREE LAW 60 SETS THE STAGE. LAST DECEMBER, WHEN HE WAS ALREADY VIGOROUSLY PUSHING HIS OWN PARTY, THIEU RADICALLY CHANGED THE GROUND RULES FOR POLITICAL PARTY ACTIVITY. UNDER HIS DECREE LAW 60 EXISTING PARTIES WERE GIVEN UNTIL MARCH 27, 1973 TO MEET STIFF NEW MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS OR DISBAND. THE DECREE ALSO REQUIRED THAT

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ALL CANDIDATES IN NATIONAL ELECTIONS BE MEMBERS OF A LEGAL PARTY. ONLY THIEU' S DEMOCRACY PARTY HAD MET THE REQUIREMENTS BY THE DEADLINE. HOWEVER TWO NEW PARTIES BOTH COALITIONS OF SEVERAL PREVIOUSLY- EXISTING PARTIES,

WERE GIVEN PERMISSION TO ORGANIZE BY THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR WITH A ONE YEAR DEADLINE FOR MEETING THE NEW REQUIREMENTS.

3. BOTH PARTIES -- THE FREEDOM PARTY AND THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE -- HAVE RUN INTO VERY REAL PROBLEMS INCLUDING PERSONALITY CLASHES, FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES, AND DWINDLING MEMBERSHIP. WITH THIEU' S DEMOCRACY PARTY EXERCISING STRONG PRESSURES AGAINST THEM, NEITHER PARTY HAS MADE ANY SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS IN ITS ORGANIZATIONAL EFFORTS IN THE PROVINCES. NEITHER STANDS A CHANCE OF MEETING THE REQUIREMENTS FOR REGISTRATION IN TIME TO PARTICIPATE IN THE AUGUST 26 ELECTION FOR 31 SENATE SEATS AND NEITHER IS LIKELY TO QUALIFY EVEN IN THE ONE YEAR PERIOD GRANTED FOR ORGANIZATION.

4. ACTING UNDER THE CONSTITUTIONAL REQUIREMENT FOR A NEW ELECTION LAW BEFORE EACH NATIONAL ELECTION, THIEU RECENTLY SENT TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY A DRAFT LAW FOR THE SENATE ELECTION. THE SENATE AMENDED THIS DRAFT TO REMOVE THE PROVISION UNDER WHICH ALL CANDIDATES MUST BE MEMBERS OF A " LEGAL " POLITICAL PARTY. THE LOWER HOUSE, NORMALLY MUCH MORE RESPONSIVE TO THIEU' S WISHES THAN THE UPPER, WAS UNABLE TO MUSTER THE TWO- THIRDS VOTE NECESSARY TO ELIMINATE THE SENATE CHANGES. ACCORDINGLY THIEU NOW HAS BEFORE HIM A BILL THROWING OPEN THE SENATE ELECTION TO ALL POLITICAL GROUPS REGARDLESS OF THEIR LEGAL STATUS.

5. A ONE- PARTY SYSTEM? THE FINAL DECISION ON THE ELECTION LAW NOW RESTS WITH THIEU. HE MAY EITHER PROMULGATE THE LAW AS IT NOW STANDS OR RETURN IT TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY WITH RECOMMENDED CHANGES WHICH, WITH THE TWO HOUSES VOTING TOGETHER, WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY BE ACCEPTED BY THE NECESSARY SIMPLE MAJORITY. HE HAS UNTIL MAY 21 TO DECIDE WHETHER TO ALLOW AN OPEN SENATE CONTEST AND

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TEMPORARILY ABANDON HIS GOALS OF USING DECREE 60 TO BUILD A ONE- PARTY SYSTEM OR WHETHER TO RESTORE THE DRAFT LAW TO THE ORIGINAL FORM IN ORDER TO PRODUCE AN UNCONTESTED ELECTION.

6. THE PRESIDENT WILL FIND IT HARD TO RESIST THE TEMPTATION TO IMPROVE HIS POSITION IN THE SENATE AT OPPOSITION' S

EXPENSE. THE SENATE IS THE ONE ARENA OF GOVERNMENT IN WHICH THIEU LACKS DECISIVE CONTROL -- HE CAN COUNT ON ONLY ABOUT 27 OF THE 60 SENATORS -- AND WHERE HE HAS MET STRONG OPPOSITION AND CRITICISM ON A NUMBER OF ISSUES. UNDER THE SENATE VERSION OF THE ELECTION LAW, THREE

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SLATES WILL BE ELECTED. FIFTEEN OF THE 31 SEATS TO BE CONTESTED ARE NOW HELD BY PRO- ADMINISTRATION SENATORS, AND THIEU, THEREFORE, MUST WIN TWO OUT OF THREE SLATES JUST TO MAINTAIN HIS POSITION.

7. THIEU COULD TRY A COMPROMISE SOLUTION. HE COULD, FOR EXAMPLE, REINSTATE THE POLITICAL PARTIES  
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